

Kansas City Missouri Police Department

COMMUNICATION PLAN

2014

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MISSION and VISION Statements

Mission: To protect and serve with professionalism, honor and integrity.

Vision: To make Kansas City and the metropolitan area the safest community in the nation as a result of the efforts of the Kansas City, Missouri Police Department and its many partners.

INTRODUCTION

The Kansas City Missouri Police Department is dedicated to being open with and accountable to the community. An informed and engaged public is the greatest asset available to a police department. Open and frequent communication from the police department fosters support, trust, and cooperation.

Likewise, communication with the more than 2,000 members of this department also is vital. Decisions and happenings should be communicated throughout the organization to maintain a unified purpose of duty, a consistent message and good morale.

The way in which messages are conveyed externally and internally also is important. Department members always should communicate with others in a respectful and professional manner.

This plan addresses both the external and internal communication duties of the Kansas City Missouri Police Department. A communication plan at both levels is necessary for a proactive, progressive organization. With such a plan in place, misinformation is reduced or eliminated, a positive and consistent message is delivered and the department is prepared for crisis situations. The plan also ensures openness is part of the KCPD culture and that all information that can be shared will be, thus engendering trust and support.

OUTLINE

This plan is broken down into the following sections:

- Goals
- Internal communication tools and stakeholders
- External communication tools and stakeholders
- Crisis communication
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Future communication possibilities

GOALS

The overall purpose of this plan is to encourage and facilitate communication with internal and external stakeholders and to provide, maintain and support the communication tools used to do so. More specifically, this plan has the following goals:

- **Proactive communication** – As opposed to a reactive approach, the idea is to plan and carry out a communications program that creates the channels of communication and the tools necessary to achieve goals.
- **Two-way communication** – The Police Department must not only speak to its stakeholders but also listen to their feedback, both internally and externally. This creates an organization that is open-minded, responsive and concerned about the well-being of those it serves.
- **Openness** – All information should be treated as public unless there is a good reason for it not to be. Openness lets stakeholders hold the organization accountable and fosters trust.
- **Positive messages** – This plan will create methods to give the Kansas City Missouri Police Department a positive reputation and respected standing among stakeholders.
- **Negative messages** – Develop and implement effective communication regarding those incidents that are not complimentary of the police department.
- **Misinformation** – Immediately correct misinformation so as to minimize concern.
- **Evaluation** – To maintain effective communication, the Department must frequently evaluate the efficacy of the tools being used and the type of feedback being received and change our messages and methods according to that feedback.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Kansas City Missouri Police Department utilizes a number of internal communications methods to relay information to both non-sworn and law enforcement personnel. The primary purpose of our internal communications system is to provide department members accurate and timely information. This system helps to prevent the spread of negative and unfounded rumors and innuendo.

Internal stakeholders are:

- KCPD members
- Families and friends of KCPD members
- Board of Police Commissioners

Methods of communication internally currently include:

- As in most organizations, ***e-mail*** is an effective means of communication that the Kansas City Police Department uses. ***Department-wide e-mails*** provide the sender the capability of alerting others of critical incidents in a timely and efficient manner.
- ***The Daily Informant*** is the department's daily newsletter that disseminates information through the department's e-mail system. This daily publication provides the reader with department-related information such as details of upcoming events, policy and procedure changes, department member transfers, and death notices of department members or members of their family, retirees, as well as other issues pertaining to the department. Department members and outside agencies supply subject matter for this on-line publication.
- The ***monthly Informant newsletter*** features stories about new and innovative department units and programs, accomplishments and other news items pertinent to KCPD members. It is created by the Media Unit.
- The Kansas City Police Department ***Intranet*** provides current information and links to publications and other vital department information. The intranet contains links to a variety of data utilized by department members on a daily basis, such as links to policies and procedures, department pay scales, photos, and a phone roster.
- ***The Chief's Blog*** allows the Chief to address important department issues using the internet. With updates several times a week, department members receive answers to important department matters.
- ***An intranet phone roster*** allows department members to have access to direct phone numbers for all non-undercover department members, thus bypassing department phone trees. Individual updates help to keep the roster current.

- The ***Awards Tracking System*** allows department members to track the progress of recommended awards on-line as those awards proceed through the approval process.
- ***Press Releases*** keep the public and department members aware of department- related and newsworthy critical events. All press releases are posted on the Chief's blog and are disseminated to media outlets.
- ***The Annual Report*** is created and distributed throughout our department and other police departments throughout the country. It is an important reference tool that contains year-end statistics and department highlights.
- ***Department memorandums*** keep all department members informed of changing policies and procedures. An updated list of all department memorandums is located on the department's intranet home page for department member reference.
- ***Crime bulletins*** keep department members apprised of crime patterns, trends and known criminals throughout Kansas City.
- The department issues an electronic ***Policy and Procedure Manual***. It is the responsibility of each department member to ensure they review each policy and electronically sign it. The department implemented the Policy Acknowledgement System (PASS), which is a paperless method of disseminating updated policies and procedures.
- Another internal communication method employed by the department is the use of ***anonymous surveys*** sent department-wide through the e-mail system. These surveys provide the requestor(s) a means to gather important and useful information about a variety of topics of concern to the department.
- The department has employed several types of ***social media*** to help keep our members updated. They are: Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and Pinterest.
- ***Internal employee forums*** are held with the Chief and Deputy Chiefs to give employees a chance to voice their concerns.
- ***One-on-one communication*** occurs on a daily basis with all members of the department and is an excellent way of communicating.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

As the KCPD continues to cultivate relationships within the community, we will annually review our channels of communication and seek new and progressive platforms to ensure our messages are received. This process is paramount as our audience will continue to keep pace with advancements in technology. Whether the KCPD is attempting to broadcast information city-wide or to a specific group, we will tailor our means of communication to a particular audience. In some instances the information the KCPD has available will be limited due to the sensitive nature, however, Chief Darryl Forté has made a commitment to keep all avenues of communication open. This is a commitment the entire department honors and expects will lead to a successful exchange of information with those we serve.

External stakeholders are:

- Residents
- Area business owners and employees
- Social service organizations
- Neighborhood groups and associations
- Media outlets
- Government officials
- Justice system personnel
- Nonprofit organizations
- Faith-based communities
- Educational institutions
- Entire metropolitan community

As mentioned earlier, the race to keep up with advancements in technology is an essential step in effective communication. In recent years, the KCPD has implemented a comprehensive assortment of communication channels to provide an umbrella of coverage. These avenues include:

- A web site, www.kcpd.org
- Chief Forté's blog
- Twitter
- Monthly newsletter, the Informant
- Videos on YouTube and Cable Access Channel 2
- Posters
- Community Forums
- Citizen Satisfaction Survey
- Press releases
- Facebook
- Pinterest
- Text message alerts through Nixle

Although the KCPD will strive to be progressive in the ways it provides communication, it should welcome the opportunity to serve the community face-to-face in a traditional manner. The Department has a dedicated Media Unit with three Public Information Officers and three non-sworn public relations specialists. Additionally, a Community Interaction Officer, whose responsibility it is to maintain open dialog with the community, is assigned to each station to assist the public. The six patrol stations and headquarters are open 24 hours a day, and patrol officers make thousands of citizen contacts every day. So whether a citizen is commenting to the chief on his blog or conversing with a station desk clerk, the KCPD is available and continually exploring new ways to disseminate information.

Depending on the message or information the Department is circulating, a stakeholder may receive messages frequently or infrequently. Many justice system and neighborhood association affiliates can receive information from KCPD on a daily basis. On the other hand, some of the educational institutions may only receive information when it is determined a threat directly affects their daily operation. Thus, the frequency of the Department's communication externally depends largely on the stakeholder.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

Definitions of crises

There are essentially two types of crises with which the Kansas City Missouri Police Department could confront: critical incidents and public relations crises.

A critical incident is defined by Procedural Instruction 09-2, "Emergency Operations Procedure," as, "Any event of a severe nature, which threatens to cause or causes the loss of life or injury to citizens and/or severe damage to property and requires extraordinary measures to protect lives and achieve recovery."

A public relations crisis for the Kansas City Police Department can be broadly defined as any situation that threatens the integrity, reputation, or standing of the department in the community, usually brought on by adverse or negative media attention.

The actions KCPD takes in these crises, and how it interacts with the media during these periods of intense public scrutiny, can critically shape the way the department is perceived, which in turn can affect the degree of support it receives.

Critical Incidents

Crisis communications rely on timely and accurate information to be successful. In keeping with the Mission Statement and Vision Statement, crisis communications need to target both department members and the general public.

- **Purpose**

The purposes of internal crisis communications are for the quick assignment and deployment of department resources to contain, control or investigate an event. The purposes of external crisis communications are to inform the public of specific dangers due to criminal activity, exposure to hazardous situations, i.e. natural gas leak, or natural disaster, or to request information pertaining to a specific crime.

- **Incident commander/spokesperson**

In internal crisis communication, a commander or other designated department member must assume command of the incident and ensure that consistent messages are sent to all internal stakeholders. Similarly, a spokesperson must be appointed for all external communication with media and the public. So as not to detract from the incident commander's duties, the spokesperson should be separate, but he/she should keep in regular contact with the incident commander to get regular updates on the situation and pass along a verified and consistent message to external stakeholders.

- **Methods**

Normally, crisis communications are conducted face-to-face, via department radios, cell phones and land-line telephones. Follow-up information and notifications about significant crises are usually handled via phone, e-mail or written documentation.

- **Best practices**

Communication in times of a critical incident should be succinct and stated plainly and with as little jargon as possible. It also should be timely, relevant, accurate, important, and provide as much information as possible to internal and external stakeholders.

- **Evaluation**

No crisis communication plan is complete without a built-in evaluation component as a way to check accountability and make improvements over time. Major evaluation activities might include analyzing media content and monitoring developments, such as shifts in public opinion, policy changes, increased membership and organizational participation, and improved institutional capacity.

Crisis Communication occurs during both short-term and long-term events. Examples of short-term events would include but are not limited to shootings, homicides or fatal accidents. Long-term events would include but are not limited to natural disasters, Operation 100's or extended searches for wanted parties. At the end of a short-term crisis, all personnel should be gathered for a short de-briefing. This provides an opportunity for personnel to identify any communication issues that could be improved upon. At the end of a long-term crisis, an after-action report should be written based on input from all affected elements. The after-action report should be disseminated to all affected elements to promote awareness of communication successes and problems.

Public relations crises

The most effective way to mitigate a public relations crisis is prevention. An organizational culture that embraces openness and accountability will go a long way toward fostering trust with the community, which the Police Department is tasked with serving. Proactively building positive and open relationships with community members and the media also can help prevent a potential reputational crisis. KCPD should have the reputation of "having nothing to hide."

Should something negative take place that could bring negative attention to the Department, a crisis communication plan must be in place to address the situation and resolve it as quickly as possible. The following guiding principles should guide all communication decisions:

- Ensure we are addressing potential officer safety issues.
- Inform department members as soon as possible.
- Keep the public interest a priority in decision making.
- Take responsibility for correcting the situation. Seldom, if ever, should we have a response of "no comment."
- Be as open as possible.
- Keep confidential information confidential.
- Be accurate.
- Be responsive. Answer phones and e-mails. Respond to all media inquiries, even if the answer is "I don't know." Tell the reporter you will try to get the answer and get back to him/her.

Public relations crises arise in one of two fashions: smoldering until reaching a boiling point, or all of a sudden. The Media Unit should be informed of any potentially sensitive issues so that

they can address the problem as quickly as possible, either by working with the news media or having impacted department elements reach out directly to those who are upset.

Public relations crises will be addressed in the following manner:

- Unless there is a compelling reason to act otherwise, all communication about the issue should come out of the Media Unit. All department elements should be ready and willing to provide information about the situation to the Media Unit.
- The Media Unit will gather and verify information about the crisis, assess the severity of the crisis, and develop strategies concerning how information is to be released, who should speak for the organization and who is to be notified.
- The Media Unit will work out logistical details of releasing information, and distribute verified information as quickly as possible to internal and external audiences, using the tools outlined in the Internal and External Communications sections of this document and/or periodic press briefings.
- In the event that the crisis has the potential to be an ongoing source of negative attention for the department, a crisis communication team should be formed. It should include the Media Unit spokesperson, a Media Unit public relations specialist, commanders of the affected element, and if necessary, the Chief of Police or his designee(s).
 - The Media Unit spokesperson will be charged with managing the accuracy and consistency of messages coming from the department.
 - The public relations specialist will develop effective strategies for disseminating information internally and externally. He/she also will monitor media coverage and correct any inaccuracies that might arise.
 - Commanders of the affected element will inform the Media Unit of the situation and keep them apprised of updated information.
 - The Chief and/or his designee(s) will make managerial decisions, inform the Media Unit of those decisions and have final approval over all messages put out by the department.

Evaluation

The Media Unit will document the news coverage surrounding a crisis, including newspaper articles, radio and television broadcasts and information published on the internet. When the crisis has passed, the Media Unit will supply the crisis team with a summary of news coverage.

Members of the team will review this report and determine the following:

- Overall success or failure of the crisis communication effort
- Lessons learned
- Appropriate follow-up measures

Crisis Communication Section Sources:

Lattimore, Dan, et. al. Public Relations: The Profession and Practice. McGraw Hill, 2004. Boston.

University of Lexington, Kentucky. Crisis Communication Plan. University of Lexington. 1999.

EVALUATION AND MONITORING

Evaluation should be aimed at assessing the effectiveness of our communication efforts and continuously monitoring our progress and making changes to the plan as needed. The only way KCPD will become efficient is by learning from experience.

To do this, we must ask: What did we accomplish? What are our strengths? Where can our communications be improved? How should we change our communication strategies to ensure continued effectiveness?

To answer these questions, KCPD must gather feedback. Methods of collecting feedback include:

- Online surveys
- E-mail surveys
- Telephone surveys
- City's Citizen Satisfaction Survey
- Blogs (Chief's Blog)
- Media coverage analysis
- Suggestions are encouraged by department members by email to the Media Unit for forwarding to the executive command staff.
- Goal/Results comparisons

The purpose of the monitoring and evaluation process is to learn which methods of communicating are most effective and most efficient for achieving our goals. Once the best methods are determined, we can tailor our communication process for future application.

FUTURE COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES

Ever-evolving technology will constantly change the ways in which KCPD communicates internally and externally. Below are projects upon which the Department could embark to enhance our communication efforts:

- Intranet – Enhancements are planned for the department's intranet site that will allow department elements greater internal information-sharing capabilities.
- Apps – Applications on smart phones and tablets can give the public immediate and convenient access to the most pertinent information about the department.
- Instagram – This photo-sharing social media platform would allow the department to interact with members of the public visually, and also could aid in criminal investigations.

CONCLUSION

This plan will undergo a major review annually, for revisions and updates. Revisions also should be included as new technological opportunities become available.